

SOFTWARE

FAQ

Q What is a dynamic website and how do I create one?

A If you create a new web page and type all your text into it, this is known as a static page because the content is fixed. Dynamic websites pull data from a database. For example, a news site displays only the newest stories on its front page. This is known as a dynamic site, as the content of the page changes automatically depending on the display criteria.

To create a dynamic site, you need to write a website that knows how to talk to a database. This is quite a bit harder than generating static pages, but it's not too difficult to teach yourself.

Microsoft's Visual Studio Express Edition (reviewed on page 57) is a tool for developing this kind of site and, best of all, it's free. It comes with sample websites, so you can see for yourself how they work.

David Ludlow
Reviews Editor



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AVANQUEST GhostSurf 2006 Identity Protector

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT

Every time you connect to the internet, you're given an IP address, which is your unique location (a little like the electronic equivalent of a postal address). While this makes all your online activities possible, it also allows websites and your ISP to track exactly what you've been doing and find out who you are. GhostSurf 2006 aims to bring anonymity back to the internet by helping you mask your IP address so that you can surf in privacy and safety.

After a quick installation, GhostSurf configures Internet Explorer automatically. If you use Firefox or Opera, the onscreen message tells you which setting you need to change. Still, wider browser support for automatic configuration would have been nice.

At this point GhostSurf isn't actually masking your internet connection. To do this you need to select the level of security you want from the program's main menu. There are four levels: Normal, Anonymous, Invisible and Secure. Normal doesn't hide anything. Invisible blocks cookies so that websites can't track you; however, some sites will stop working as they require cookies. If you run into this problem, you can manually permit those sites to use cookies. The Invisible setting blocks cookies, but also routes your traffic through other servers on the internet. This prevents websites working out your IP address, but surfing is slower as you no longer have a direct connection to the internet. Secure does all the above and also encrypts your data. This is useful if you're using a wireless hotspot, as it stops other people snooping on your network traffic, but it is slower than using a direct connection to the internet.

GhostSurf can also make your Instant Messenger (IM) messages anonymous. However, as you have to log in with your username and password, the IM providers can still track you. We tested the service with www.whatismyipaddress.com. Without GhostSurf enabled it detected our IP address, but with GhostSurf it displayed an incorrect address.

SUMMARY

- ☒ Protects your online identity
- ☒ Good value
- ☒ Tools focus on Internet Explorer

ONLINE IDENTITY PROTECTOR Requires Windows 2000/XP, 350MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 16MB disk space
SUPPLIER Avenquest 01752 895100
DETAILS www.avenquest.co.uk

GhostSurf 2006 isn't just for web surfers who want to remain anonymous. It also has several tools that protect against pop-up advertisements and spyware. We found the settings a little hard to get to and they can be confusing. For example, one of the ad blocker's Advanced options lets you block script timers, but there's no information as to what this option actually does. In fact, if you go to the online help and click the Advanced options link, you're shown a page with help for the Standard options tab. The software is also preconfigured not to download updates to the list of known advertisers. To make sure your protection remains up to date, you should turn this option on.

It's not all bad, though, and some of the other features are easier to use. The anti-spyware tool, SpyCatcher, works well and, once it's turned on, you won't need much interaction with it. It's a well-respected anti-spyware tool and comes with a year's subscription for updates. The Personal Data Vault is another handy application that lets you create encrypted, password-protected storage. You can drag and drop files into it, but you can also store usernames and passwords securely.

Finally, TracksCleaner deletes history and recent file data from your PC. While you can do this manually, TracksCleaner does the job in a single click and also takes care of other applications including IM clients, Office and the Clipboard. Unfortunately, the only browser it supports is Internet Explorer, so it's not much use if you use Firefox.

If you want to prevent people tracking your internet usage, GhostSurf will keep you anonymous.

It's easy to use and, considering it includes SpyCatcher too, it's also good value.

However, we feel that some of the advanced options are too difficult to understand, and the focus on Internet Explorer means that the clean-up features aren't much use to those who use alternative browsers.

David Ludlow



◀ The slider makes it easy to select the level of protection you want

SERIF DrawPlus 8

★★★★

£83 inc VAT

The companies that make drawing and illustration software tend to focus on the professional end of the market, as typified by expensive programs such as Adobe's Illustrator and the recently upgraded CorelDraw. Serif's DrawPlus is something of an exception, as it attempts to provide affordable drawing tools for amateur artists and hobbyists.

The latest version of DrawPlus includes a long list of new features, although the most significant new tools help you create effects that look more like bitmap paint effects than conventional vector-based drawings.

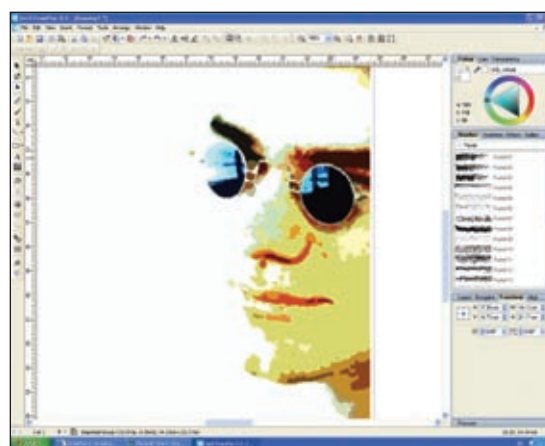
The most important new feature is the paint brush tool, which allows you to choose from around 200 different types of brush. The simplest brushes are small vector-based designs, such as a snowflake or a yin-yang symbol. Selecting one of these brushes allows you to paint the relevant symbol quickly across the screen, perhaps dotting a series of snowflakes across a landscape scene.

However, there are more complex brushes that attempt to mimic the appearance of paint effects. The water paint brushes simulate the appearance of a watery

streak of paint that tapers towards the end of the stroke, just as a real brush stroke would. However, a kind of vector skeleton follows the path of your stroke. You can edit your brush stroke by using the program's vector tools to click on the skeleton and change its shape. The brush stroke then adjusts itself so that it follows the new path. This allows you to create realistic paint effects that you can edit with a precision that isn't possible in bitmap-based programs such as Corel's Painter Essentials program.

The brush library includes categories for water paints, pencils, charcoal and pastels, so you have plenty of scope to experiment. You can also apply a variety of paper textures to your drawings to create even more realistic effects.

However, you'll still need a bit of artistic talent to create your own drawings using these brushes. We think Serif is missing a trick here by not making it easier for less-talented people to import photographs and turn them into drawings and sketches. There is an Auto-trace feature that can



▲ New brushes allow DrawPlus 8 users to create realistic paint effects and adjust their brush strokes after they've made them

attempt to do this for you, but it's rather slow and clumsy and not ideal for beginners who need a little help to get started.

The biggest problem for DrawPlus is that people who want to create natural-media artwork might simply be tempted to buy a genuine natural-media program, such as Painter Essentials, which is a little cheaper than DrawPlus. However, vector graphics are still more useful for creating artwork such as logos and letterheads, as well as animated graphics for use on web pages and presentations. If that's what you need, DrawPlus is an effective, affordable option. However, amateur artists who simply want to create nice-looking paintings and sketches should go for Painter Essentials instead.

Cliff Joseph

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good price
- ✓ Versatile paint features
- ✗ Painter Essentials costs less

DRAWING PROGRAM Requires Windows 98 SE or above, 500MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 400MB disk space

SUPPLIER Serif 0800 376 7070
DETAILS www.serif.com

Also consider...

MICROSOFT Works Suite 2006

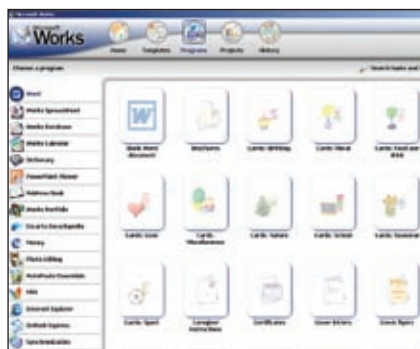
★★★★★

£69 inc VAT

BEST BUY Microsoft Office may be the obvious choice of office suite, but it's expensive for home users and a little business-focused. Microsoft has a more home-friendly range of software in Works Suite 2006, and all for well under £100.

The package contains Word, Digital Image Standard, Money, AutoRoute Essentials, Encarta and the organiser that glues them all together, Works. However, you get the older 2002 version of Word rather than the newer Word 2003. As the new version provides better security, more options for tracking document changes and mark-up features used to prepare content for professional databases, the presence of Word 2002 is a disappointment.

The other packages are well worth the money, though, and provide pretty much every function the average home user will need. Unless you intend to use your PC to run a small business, Works Suite is a stunning collection of software at a bargain price.



OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 SE or above, 700MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space, Internet Explorer 6
PRODUCT CODE B11-01360 **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com **DETAILS** www.microsoft.com/worksuite Includes Word and handy home software such as Encarta Old version of Word **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2006

SONY Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6

★★★★★

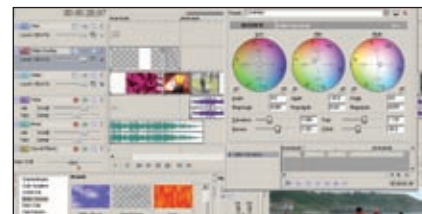
£73 inc VAT

PRICE CUT!

BEST BUY Platinum Edition is new to the Vegas family and adds support for High-Definition Video cameras. With a range of new effects over the standard edition, including the excellent Colour Corrector, it's well worth the extra £15.

Movie Studio has finally caught up and even surpassed its rival, Adobe's Premiere Elements.

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE SPVMSDV6000 **SUPPLIER** www.savastore.com **DETAILS** www.sonymediasoftware.com
 Lots of powerful new features DVD Architect Studio might be bewildering for beginners **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2005



TUNEUP UTILITIES TuneUp Utilities 2006

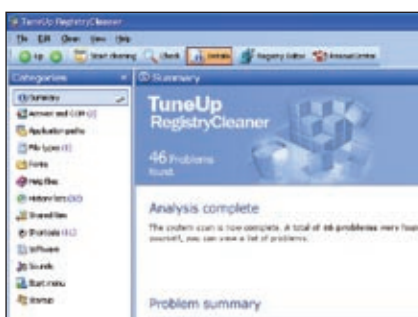
★★★

£36 inc VAT

It's no wonder suites such as TuneUp Utilities are so popular. Everyday use takes its toll on a family PC. It isn't just the games demos, either; 'handy' utilities downloaded from the internet – not to mention spyware – all slow down or break your PC. It doesn't help that Windows is no good at cleaning up after itself, while uninstallation programs routinely leave your computer with a sprinkling of unnecessary files and Registry entries.

TuneUp promises to spring-clean your system in one go. In reality, it's a jack of all trades. All the suite's components are launched from a single, easy-to-use interface, but while some of the tools in its Customize & Analyze, Clean Up & Repair and Optimize & Improve submenus allow you to get under Windows' skin, others such as the grand-sounding System Control and Styler 2 make mostly cosmetic changes to the operating system's appearance, as well as duplicating functions from Windows' folder options.

The problem with most of TuneUp's tools is that they are simply repackaged features that are already built into Windows. System



▲ TuneUp did a good job of removing redundant Registry entries but left other problems behind

Information can already be found in Control Panel; Process Manager is a ritzier Task Manager (and getting to the Windows' version using Ctrl-Alt-Del is a damn sight quicker); even the Registry Editor offers nothing that Windows doesn't. Some of Windows' features aren't immediately obvious, or are difficult to fathom, but in a suite such as this we'd expect at least to have a better explanation of their functions.

StartUp Manager, for instance, is simply a snazzier-looking version of Windows' Msconfig. It provides a list of all the software that starts automatically when your system boots and asks you to tick those you want to enable or disable. All it adds is the reassurance that a particular program is 'Trustworthy', although it didn't trust common applications such as Adobe Acrobat's



▲ A single, easy-to-use interface provides access to TuneUp's suite of tools

automatic update. As with Msconfig, there's no explanation of what files do, even if they're standard Windows components, so beginners are left in the dark as to what changes to make.

The only really useful elements in the suite are the Registry Cleaner and Defragmenting tools, plus System Optimizer and the secure deletion tool TuneUp Shredder. Registry Cleaner did a decent job of weeding out redundant entries, but it failed to rid our test PC of tricky keys containing null values, which spyware uses to prevent their deletion. System Optimizer identified a few tweaks to improve broadband speed.

TuneUp Utilities goes some way to doing what it claims, but there's really not enough here that isn't already available in Windows, or that you can't get as freeware. Repackaging system tools to make them easier is a double-edged sword, and without any adequate explanation of exactly what changes you're about to make, the consequences could be disastrous.

James Nixon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Windows does many of the same jobs
- ✗ Not much help for beginners

SYSTEM CLEANER Requires Windows 98 or above, 133MHz processor, 32MB RAM, 15MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.softwareparadise.co.uk
DETAILS www.tune-up.com

Also consider...

MAGIX Audio Cleaning Lab 10 Deluxe

★★★★★

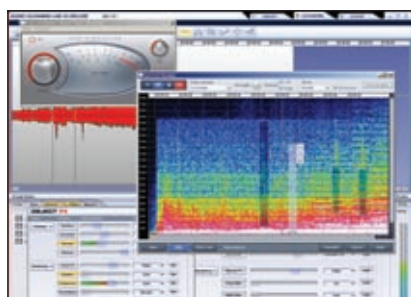
£29 inc VAT



Magix's Audio Cleaning Lab converts vinyl and cassette recordings to digital, but it's also well suited for preparing your own music for public consumption.

The Spectral Cleaning feature helps remove unwanted noises, such as coughs, from recordings. For musicians, it's a must.

AUDIO RESTORATION Requires Windows 98 or above, 450MHz processor, 64MB RAM PRODUCT CODE MAG0010 DETAILS www.magix.com ✓ Superb audio-optimisation tools ✗ Effect chain order is fixed FULL REVIEW May 2006



AVANQUEST RadioTracker Premium

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT



Finding new music and building a large MP3 collection is a difficult and expensive task. With Radiotracker Premium you can do both for just the cost of the software. It monitors internet radio stations that broadcast in MP3 format and downloads songs to your PC.

You have control over the genre and quality that you're interested in, but the music you'll get remains a surprise.

Only a few of our downloads were incomplete or had the start of another track at the end. As a way of grabbing new music, this is well worth the money.



MP3 RIPPING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space, broadband internet connection SUPPLIER www.avanquest.co.uk DETAILS www.avanquest.co.uk ✓ Gets lots of tracks quickly ✗ Some settings are confusing FULL REVIEW Apr 2006

ABLETON Live 5

★★★★★

£265 inc VAT



Ableton Live is an extraordinary piece of software, designed to help you produce your live performance. Its excellent Session View lets you trigger recorded clips on the fly, making the software more of an instrument than a recording platform. If you plan to perform on stage, there's no better choice than Live.

MUSIC PRODUCTION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 600MHz processor, 512MB RAM PRODUCT CODE 28683 SUPPLIER www.gear4music.com DETAILS www.ableton.com ✓ Flexible performance tools ✗ Not the best for straightforward recording FULL REVIEW Nov 2005



GOTOMYPC Personal 5

★★★★★

\$20 (around £12) per month

Webmail accounts and online storage sites such as www.xdrive.com enable you to get hold of your documents from any computer with an internet connection, but what if you want to get into the nuts and bolts of your PC to retrieve files or make changes to the operating system? GoToMyPC is a remote access program that allows you to take control of an internet-connected PC securely from any other internet-connected computer.

The program is available as a free 30-day trial from www.gotomypc.com. You'll be asked to provide your credit card details, and after the trial period expires users of the Personal version are charged a \$20-a-month (around £12) subscription.

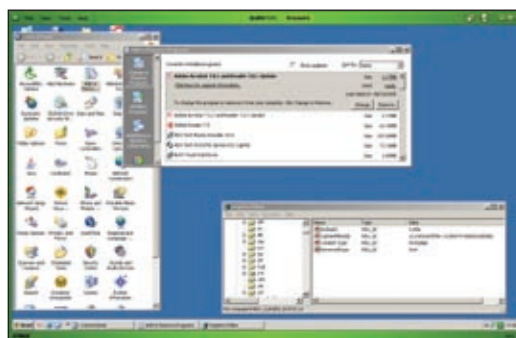
Access to the host is protected by two 128-bit AES-encrypted passwords. One of these logs you into your GoToMyPC account and the other is stored only on the host PC for security. You can specify additional passwords that work only once, to allow others temporary access to your system.

Once connected, the host PC's Windows desktop appears in a MYPC Viewer window on the remote PC's desktop. A small pop-up from the host PC's System Tray

indicates that the system is being accessed remotely, although Security settings on the client PC enable you to blank out the host's screen and disable its mouse and keyboard. Once connected, you can use your mouse and keyboard to access or change any file or setting on the computer, including sensitive areas such as altering Registry keys. You can send and receive files to and from folders on the host simply by dragging and dropping them to and from the Viewer window, as well as cutting and pasting up to 32K of text. You can even send a Ctrl-Alt-Del command to open Windows' Task Manager.

This version claims to have improved performance. When we tried it with a 1Mbit broadband connection, GoToMyPC was incredibly fast. Menus opened and programs started with a barely perceptible pause, even when we enabled the 24-bit colour display option. Only moving large windows around the screen caused any significant delay.

If you find you're having speed difficulties, though, you can improve performance by dropping to 256 colours or disabling Windows graphical effects such as drop shadows and



▲ Access your PC over the internet, change your system settings and even scrawl all over the screen with GoToMyPC

animated menus for the duration of your connection. These settings appear in a dialog box on the host computer's screen, so if you're using the Zoom tool, you'll need to restore the full-screen display to see them.

As well as providing a way of grabbing a file or checking a setting from another computer, GoToMyPC includes a Draw tool, which enables support technicians or teachers to indicate buttons, menus and other items onscreen. Unfortunately, there's no facility for creating captions or speech bubbles, and the program can't transmit audio, so you'll need to keep your scrawls neat.

GoToMyPC Personal is an incredibly fast and fairly versatile service for getting into your system while you're away from home, but it's pricy. Our current favourite, LogMeIn (see 'Also consider...' on page 52), offers most of the same features, with the exception of file transfers, in its free version.

James Nixon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Very quick
- ✓ Can transfer files easily
- ✗ LogMeIn does almost the same job free

REMOTE ACCESS PROGRAM Requires Windows XP, broadband internet connection
DETAILS www.gotomypc.com

Also consider...

SYMANTEC Norton Ghost 10

★★★★★

£35 inc VAT



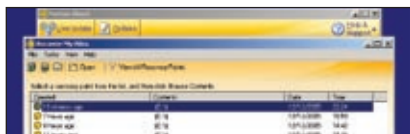
It stands to reason that, at some point, your PC will go wrong and you'll need to turn to backups to get it working again. Symantec's Norton Ghost 10 aims to make this task as easy as possible.

For starters, it automatically makes a complete image of your PC, operating system and all. When you restore an image, you get all your data and all your settings back the way you want them.

These files can be large, so Ghost 10 introduces scheduled incremental backups, where only those files that have changed are saved. It's an essential program for PC owners.

DISK-IMAGING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 300MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 160MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 10439689-IN SUPPLIER

www.savastore.com DETAILS www.symantec.co.uk
✓ Powerful and easy to use ✗ Restore CD changed our system clock FULL REVIEW Apr 2006



MACROMEDIA Dreamweaver 8

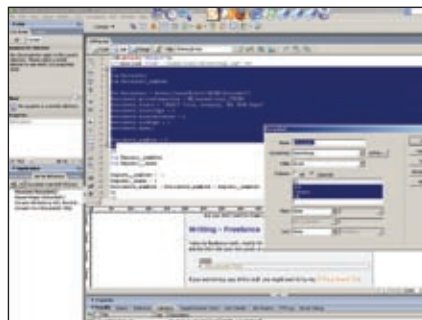
★★★★★

£316 inc VAT



If you have anything to do with developing professional websites, Dreamweaver 8 is the best £316 you'll ever spend. Miles ahead of the competition, it has everything. Whether you design the look of a site or incorporate dynamic data, Dreamweaver has the tools you need. It's too expensive for the home user, though.

WEB-DESIGN SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 650MB disk space, 1,024x768-pixel display SUPPLIER www.dabs.com DETAILS www.macromedia.com ✓ Improved CSS interface ✗ Too expensive for most home users FULL REVIEW Dec 2005



SERIF PagePlus 11

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT



The latest version of Serif's PagePlus maintains the high quality set by previous incarnations. The best new feature is the ability to work directly with PDFs, which you can open, edit and save just as if they were native PagePlus documents.

The program also handles missing fonts well, which is an excellent feature for anyone who swaps and shares lots of documents. A tidy new user interface rounds off an excellent package.

DTP SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or above, Pentium processor, 64MB RAM, 240MB disk space SUPPLIER Serif 0800 376 7070 DETAILS www.serif.com ✓ PDF import feature ✗ Takes a while to master and tutorials aren't interactive FULL REVIEW Feb 2006



ROXIO Easy DVD Copy 2 Deluxe

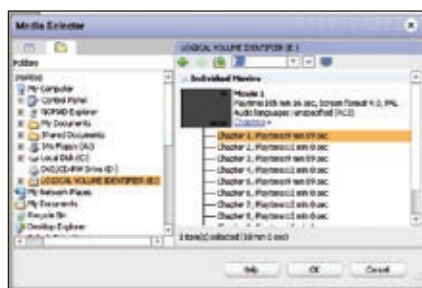
★★★★★

£14 inc VAT

Like so many other disc-copying tools, Roxio's Easy DVD Copy 2 Deluxe is destined to disappoint in one very important area: it won't let you duplicate commercial DVD movie discs that are protected using CSS encryption, and it can't strip out Macrovision. And besides, that would be illegal, wouldn't it? Roxio makes absolutely certain you know this with a disclaimer that appears when the program launches.

What you get for the very reasonable price of £14 is a program that makes quick and easy backups of your own DVD movie discs, as well as providing a few handy tools such as compression so that you can fit a two-layer DVD's contents on a single-layer 4.7GB disc.

The program's main interface couldn't be simpler. By default, it opens in CD & DVD Copy mode, and presents you with two drop-down boxes to specify source and destination drives. Don't worry if you don't have two DVD drives, as a virtual disc image burner is included, which enables you to copy to the PC's hard disk and back off



▲ Make disc-to-disc copies with just one DVD drive by making a disc image on your hard disk

again using a single DVD writer. As we've said, you can't use CD & DVD Copy to duplicate commercial discs. If the source disc is protected, a brief message tells you so and the Save As or Burn button remains greyed out.

Using a homemade DVD movie disc, we were prompted to choose how many duplicates we wanted to make and given a number of advanced options, including the ability to leave out any languages from the soundtrack that we didn't want. We're not sure how many people record DIY movies for the consumption of the entire

Eurovision audience, but the option's there.

The second element of Disc Copier is a compilation maker. This works pretty much like standard disc-burning software: you simply drag and drop files into the window, check them in a small preview window and trim them to fit. It can then output



▲ The Disc Copier lets you make video compilations by dragging and dropping files

files in Windows Media Video 9 format or, new in this version, DivX. This highly compressed format enables you to squeeze a full DVD movie on a rewritable CD.

Two further applications complete the DVD Copy 2 Deluxe suite. Disc Image Loader allows you to preview the contents of disc images you've saved to your hard disk in a virtual drive without burning them first, which is something standard disc-burning software can't do. Sonic Cine Player is a very basic movie and DVD playback program, and lacks frills such as the aspect ratio correction or sophisticated surround-sound options you'll find in PowerDVD or WinDVD, but it can capture still snapshots from movies, unlike Windows Media Player.

Even if Easy DVD Copy 2's name involves a little sleight of hand, it's a very useful utility for anyone dealing with their own DVD movies. If you don't already own an up-to-date version of Ahead's Nero or Roxio's own Easy Media Creator 8, which includes the same facilities, it's well worth the money.

James Nixon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Cheap
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Does no more than Easy Media Creator 8

DISC-BURNING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space plus up to 9GB for copying DVD-Video discs **PRODUCT CODE** 223500EFG **SUPPLIER** www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.roxio.co.uk

Also consider...

3AM LABS LogMeIn

★★★★★

Free; Professional edition \$13 (around £7) per month



If you've ever needed to access your PC while you've been away, LogMeIn is just the software for you. The free version gives you full remote control of your PC over the internet and works brilliantly.

The Professional version adds support for file transfers and guest invitations, and lets you use email to send links to files on your PC. It's an excellent piece of software for anyone who does a lot of remote work.

REMOTE CONTROL SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or above, Internet Explorer, broadband internet connection **SUPPLIER** www.3amlabs.com **DETAILS** www.logmein.com ✓ Simple remote control of a PC ✗ Java application not very fast **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2005



MOZILLA Firefox 1.0

★★★★★

Free

Firefox 1.0 is by far the best web browser that we have ever used. Introducing advanced features such as tabbed browsing and support for RSS feeds, it leaps and bounds ahead of Microsoft's Internet Explorer. When you also consider that it's better at rendering pages and is free, there's little excuse not to use it.

WEB BROWSER Requires Windows 98 or above, 500MHz Pentium processor, 128MB RAM, 52MB disk space **SUPPLIER** www.getfirefox.com ✓ Improved secure browsing ✗ Doesn't work with all websites **FULL REVIEW** Feb 2005



ADOBE Photoshop Elements 4.0

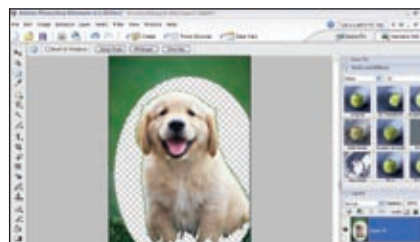
★★★★★

£68 inc VAT; upgrade £58



The latest version of Photoshop Elements blows the competition away. It has stunning new organisation features, including the ability to search for photos that contain people's faces. With the best range of editing features on the market and a low price, this program is one for all photo-editing enthusiasts.

PHOTO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 800MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** AD07071A **SUPPLIER** www.microanvika.com **DETAILS** www.adobe.co.uk ✓ Impressive photo-editing tools ✗ Clunky online help system **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2006



GOOGLE Desktop Search 3

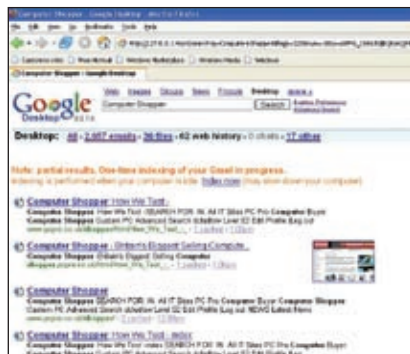
★★★★★

Free

Although still at the beta stage, Google's Desktop Search is now at its third version. Fortunately, it's still free from Google's website. The basic principle is the same: Desktop Search makes searching your PC as quick and easy as searching the internet.

You can do this in several ways. First, Google's home page includes a link to your desktop PC. Just type in your search term and you can filter your search results by emails, files and web history. It's very quick and accurate, but the simple filter terms aren't as good as those on Microsoft's Desktop Search, which also lets you filter images and audio files.

Google has worked hard to bring its search to other parts of your PC. First, Outlook gains a Google search bar, so you can find emails quickly. It's much faster and more accurate than Outlook's built-in search, but you can't



▲ Searching your PC is very quick with Google Desktop

start scrolling through the results until the search has completely finished, which is quite annoying.

One of the best things about this application is the number of plug-ins available. Google Desktop can't search your Outlook Express email by default, but by downloading plug-ins, you can increase the number of files and applications it can search, including Outlook Express files. There's even a plug-in that lets you search for picture and MP3 files, bringing Desktop Search in line with its competitors.

Perhaps the best way to interact with Desktop Search is through the Sidebar, which takes up permanent residence on your desktop. This contains various panels, each with its own purpose. So you can have panels for built-in weather reports, an email tracker, access to Google maps and a Scratch Pad for taking notes.

The Sidebar offers a much wider range of facilities now than it did when it was first introduced in the second version of Desktop Search. It has also seen some improvements, such as support for UK cities in the Weather bar.

Google Talk was available in the last version of the software, but Google has improved its integration. You can now right-click any



▲ The Sidebar gives quick access to your files and information from the web

entry on the Sidebar, such as the current weather report, and send the information to one of your online buddies. This works really well, and is hampered only by the limited availability of Google Talk. To register with the service you need a Google Mail account and you can't get one of these unless you're invited to join the service by another account holder.

As well as expanding the desktop search engine by downloading plug-ins, you can extend the Sidebar with new panels. A healthy number of developers are making these, and we've downloaded a range of new updates. Our current favourites are a To Do list, iTunes controller, the TimeWarp clock and the System Monitor, which lets us keep an eye on how well our PC is performing. All these extra sidebars are free, quick to download and very easy to install.

The only limit to how many you can download is your screen's resolution: at 1,280x1,024 we found that nine panels were about the limit before they became too small to use easily.

Simple to use and with hundreds of extra plug-ins available, Google's Desktop Search 3 is a powerful application that all PC owners should install.

David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent sidebar
- ✓ Provides quick PC searches
- ✗ Basic installation searches few file types

DESKTOP SEARCH TOOL Requires Windows 2000/XP, 200MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 10MB disk space
DETAILS <http://desktop.google.com>

APPLIED ACOUSTIC SYSTEMS Lounge Lizard EP-3

★★★★★

£79 inc VAT

Applied Acoustic Systems' Lounge Lizard EP-3 is a software emulation of the electric pianos popular with Motown, funk and jazz bands and, more recently, hip-hop producers and Radiohead soundalikes. It can run as a standalone program or as a VST or DirectX instrument plug-in in a host audio sequencer. Boxed copies of version three cost around £150 including VAT, but if you buy version two, you can upgrade for free at www.applied-acoustics.com.

Rather than using sampled recordings, Lounge Lizard makes its sounds using a technique called physical modelling, a mathematical model of the instrument's acoustic properties, with virtual

mallets hitting virtual tuned forks, sensed by virtual pickups. You can adjust the stiffness of the mallet and the distance between the fork and pickup, giving direct control over the sound itself rather than merely processing a pre-recorded sound. It also means the instrument responds realistically to dynamics, producing the full gamut of tones from quiet to loud. Version three adds a Wurliitzer-style pickup model to the

Rhodes one in previous versions, an enhanced fork model with realistic damping and an improved effects section.

The extensive controls mean it's possible to get anything from dreamy, undulating vibraphone-like tones to a nasal, reedy spank or a bell-like chime. In



▲ Extensive controls let you fine-tune the Lounge Lizard for sweet or outlandish sounds

fact, Lounge Lizard can go well beyond realistic simulations, and extreme settings can sound pretty outlandish, although not always in a good way. The unusual controls take some getting used to, but an excellent preset library guides the way.

Lounge Lizard goes way beyond the sample-based emulations we've heard, and although many of the presets sound too quirky or naff, the extensive control is a delight.

Lounge Lizard's flexibility makes it an excellent choice for any budding musician who's looking for a different sound, but it needs careful fine-tuning so as not to sound too outlandish.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Authentic sound
- ✓ Extensive tone control
- ✗ Can be difficult to operate

VIRTUAL INSTRUMENT Requires Windows 98/Me/2000/XP, 800MHz Pentium III processor, 128MB RAM, ASIO/WDM sound card
SUPPLIER www.dv247.com
DETAILS www.applied-acoustics.com

MICROSOFT Visual Studio 2005 Express

★★★★★

Free

Microsoft's free Visual Studio 2005 is an attempt to encourage hobbyists and even professional non-enterprise developers to adopt the .NET Framework 2.0, ASP.NET 2.0 and related technologies. There are no licensing restrictions (you can use them for commercial purposes) and they are free for a year. Visual Studio Express 2005 comes in a range of versions, which is split into three categories: Windows development, database development and web development.

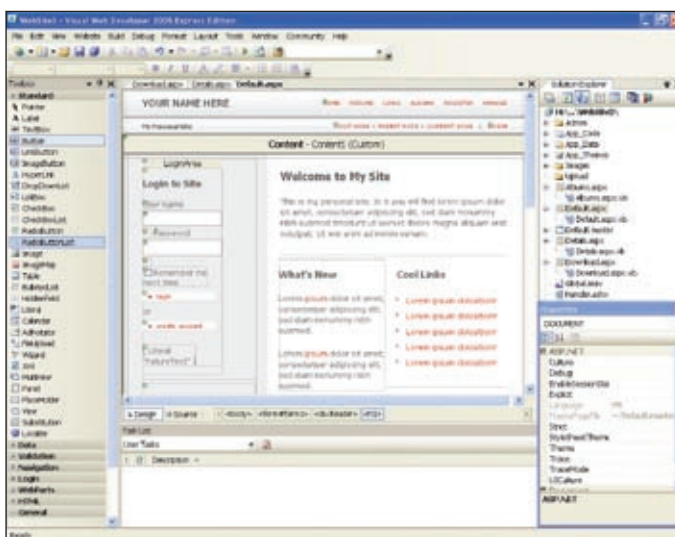
There are four editions for Windows developers and all are based on a different .NET language: Visual Basic, C#, C++ and J#. First-time .NET developers may be more comfortable with the Visual Basic version as syntactically it's similar in style to previous versions of Visual Basic.

Then there is the SQL Server 2005 Express Edition for database development, which is a powerful and easy-to-use database that complements each Express edition. It offers a substantial range of features that are available in the full SQL Server 2005, along with a few limitations that constrain the size of the databases you can build with it.

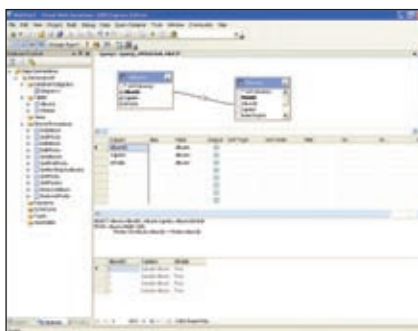
For web developers there is Visual Web Developer 2005 Express Edition, which we'll focus on in this review. This is an extremely powerful development environment that allows hobbyists to create professional-looking and slickly written websites and web services easily in Visual Basic .NET or C#.

A clear sign that Microsoft is aiming the Express version of Visual Web Developer 2005 at the enthusiast is the fact that you don't need Windows' own web server, Internet Information Services (IIS). It isn't even included in Windows XP Home Edition. To allow for this, Visual Web Developer ships with its own built-in development web server, which allows pages in your web application to be browsed and debugged from the local computer, although not from remote computers. When you're ready to go live with your creation, you'll need an ASP.NET service provider to host it for you.

There's a lot to take in, particularly if you've never programmed before, so Microsoft has included some sample applications, called Starter Kits, and ASP.NET QuickStarts. Starter Kits are websites that are ready to run, which you can tailor to your personal requirements. One example is the Personal Web Site Starter Kit, which provides a typical personal site including a photo album system and static pages for your CV or links to other sites. If nothing else, they let you see the elements that make up a website and how they fit together. The ASP.NET QuickStarts are a series of ASP.NET samples so you can get used to the



▲ The free Visual Web Developer is ideal for hobbyists

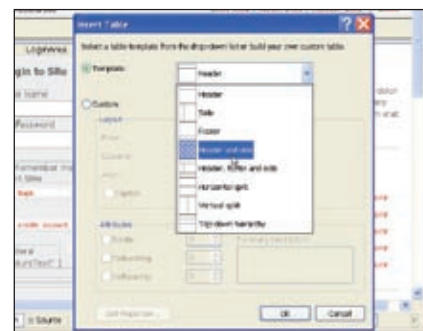


▲ The data modeller makes it easy for the non-expert to design a database

syntax and architecture. They can be selected and saved on your hard disk during installation, or you can access them online later.

If you're not an HTML expert, the Integrated Development Environment has several features to help you design sites visually. First, there's the visual design interface, which allows you to design your web pages as you would a page in a word-processing document. All the common formatting controls such as font selection and size, bullets, numbering, text aligning and more are available. You can also use the rich array of controls provided in the Toolbox to add HTML elements such as tables and hyperlinks, as well as more complex controls such as login, validation and data controls. The designer automatically generates the HTML for you behind the scenes, which you can see at any time by switching to Source mode. While you may still prefer to use other, more dedicated commercial web page layout tools such as Dreamweaver, these will not help you integrate Server Controls (such as the Login control) easily into your web pages in the way Visual Web Developer 2005 Express is designed to do.

There are a couple of new features to help you achieve a consistent look and feel for your website. The Table Designer makes it easier to design web page layouts by using pre-designed templates to achieve a consistent page style. You can also create a



▲ Adding HTML elements such as tables is simple using the templates in the Toolbox

Master Page, which defines the look, feel and behaviour for all the pages in your website or just a group. When you create a new page, you simply tell it to inherit the Master Page's style.

To make your website truly dynamic, you will need a data source. SQL Server 2005 Express Edition is available as a separate, free download and ships with its own wizard for creating new databases. However, for convenience you may prefer to use the database creation and management wizards that are available directly in Visual Web Developer 2005 Express. These provide a time-saving interface for designing SQL Server 2005 Express databases, and allow you to connect to your data from your web application by drag-and-drop instead of having to write code or open a separate instance of SQL Server.

If you prefer, you can connect your web applications to any data source, such as MySQL, provided you include the correct Connector in your application library. In the case of MySQL you could use the MySQL ODBC Connector or the MySQL .NET Connector.

Although Visual Web Developer 2005 Express Edition doesn't offer the full power of Enterprise Architect, it is packed with all the features the enthusiast needs to create exciting and dynamic websites. It's still a fairly complex tool to use, though. If you're new to programming, there's a lot to learn, so we recommend reading a book on the subject. You can find a feature on how to program with Visual Studio on page 142. There's little else against it and it's brilliant for anyone who wants to develop web applications.

Perry Banton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Free
- ✓ Very powerful
- ✗ A lot to learn

PROGRAMMING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 600MHz processor, 192MB RAM, 500MB disk space
SUPPLIER Microsoft 08706 010100
DETAILS www.microsoft.co.uk